

Biko: A Portrait in Words

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I Write What I Like by Steve Biko was published 39 years ago. The book consists of writings that were written by Biko almost 47 years ago. Instrumental behind the publication of the book was Fr Aelred Stubbs CR, who knew Biko and who wanted to pay tribute to him. Like many, Fr Stubbs was disturbed by the cruel manner in which Biko was murdered by the apartheid regime. *I Write What I Like*, therefore, was meant to keep Biko's memory alive.

I Write What I Like has achieved more than upholding the memory. The book has been an obsession of two other generations after Biko. The appreciation and growth of interest in his ideas has increased phenomenally. This is mainly due to the strength of his writings that form this book. Biko's creative and imaginative power and the genius and intellectual value of his experiences deserve an exploration that retains African originality in scholarly interpretation. This paper seeks to bring forth Biko's life experiences and how these impacted his writings.

Biko was well placed in history. His writings are both reflective and provocative. Chinua Achebe (2012:61) sums up the connection created by "the written word" between the writer and the reader as follows:

The triumph of the written word is often attained when the writer achieves union and trust with the reader, who then becomes ready to be drawn deep into the unfamiliar territory, walking in borrowed literary shoes so to speak, toward a deeper understanding of self or society, or foreign peoples, cultures, and situations.

This reader-writer connection in Biko's case is mainly on the themes that he is dealing with and, in the way he employs a foreign language like English to advance enlightenment about Africa and her cause.

Some of the writings in *I Write What I Like* are pieces that were picked up from a student bulletin called *Saso Newsletter*, a publication that created a platform for in-depth political analysis where writing and political talent among the 1960-1970s black university students was nurtured. *I Write What I Like*, therefore, offers readers a window to the genius of the most creative political generation that South Africa has ever produced.